



MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SENIOR SERVICES

Public Health Preparedness and Response UPDATE

Keeping You Informed

September 2004

DHSS Receives \$25.9 million for Bioterrorism Preparedness Efforts

The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) was awarded \$25.9 million in federal grants to expand and continue its efforts to protect Missouri's citizens during a public health emergency or terrorist attack. During the next 12 months, Missouri will receive \$16.4 million through CDC's Public Health Preparedness and Response for Bioterrorism grant. A \$9.5 million grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) will support hospital preparedness. This is the third year for the funding; the new grant period covers September 1, 2004 to August 31, 2005.

Missouri's Emergency Response Efforts Enhanced with the Health Professional Volunteer Registry

The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services and the Missouri Division of Professional Registration have entered into an agreement to establish a web-based registry to collect and manage data on all licensed health care professionals willing to assist with the increased influx of patients during an emergency or mass casualty event.

Health care professionals will have the opportunity to enroll as volunteers when they renew their license or anytime throughout the year. DHSS and the Missouri State Board of Nursing have entered into a memorandum of agreement to establish this web-based registry that will be implemented in various stages with the first being nurse license renewals in the spring of 2005.

Specific information such as address, region of residence, profession, expertise, availability, and the status of credentials will be collected from the health professional as part of the registration process into the Volunteer Health Professionals roster. Collecting this information will increase the State's ability to rapidly contact and deploy health professionals to a particular location during a public health emergency.

Volunteers may be deployed to Strategic National Stockpile dispensing sites, treatment centers, and other locations where patients are being treated. Health care professionals registered as volunteers will receive information on bioterrorism preparedness training opportunities from the DHSS.

This program is voluntary and licensed health care professionals registering as volunteers can elect not to participate in an event due to personal circumstances.

Health care professionals that are interested in becoming a volunteer, should contact the Division of Professional Registration at (573) 751-0293.

Chemical Terrorism Response Program Expands Capabilities of Missouri's Public Health Laboratory

According to threat analyst projections, the probability of a chemical terrorism event ranks second only to explosives as a terrorist's weapon of choice. Chemicals are very prevalent in our everyday environment, with approximately 6 million different types of chemicals in existence. Many of these chemicals are considered hazardous and are easily accessible.

Terrorists may choose to expose a person or population to a hazardous chemical by spiking foods or water distribution systems, contaminating surfaces, releasing gases in ventilation systems or closed spaces, or dispersing by mobile releases. No matter what the method, public health will serve an important role during such an event by protecting the physical and mental health of the population, and helping to minimize disease, injury, and disability.

Public health has similar roles in either an infectious disease outbreak or a chemical terrorism event. The main objective is to determine the causative agent, usually by circumstantial information, prior intelligence, clinical syndromes, or the analysis of environmental and biological fluids. The analysis of biological fluids can provide communities with the answers to questions that must be addressed in a chemical crisis. Data from public health laboratories will be used to determine the temporal or geographic distribution of the exposure, relative exposures (high vs. low), and the worried well. Based on this information, public health professionals will be able to make sound decisions about how to respond, treat, and intervene.

Biological fluid examination can also provide post-event surveillance, which can ultimately lead to disease prevention. Management of long-term effects of a chemical exposure will be critical to the recovery of a local community.

The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services' Public Health Laboratory has been working to improve its ability to provide this important information to the local communities. The State Public Health Laboratory has developed a chemical terrorism response program to provide analysis of biological fluids to help respond to and mitigate a chemical terrorism event. The laboratory has successfully implemented methods for the analysis of cyanide in blood and 12 different toxic elements in urine. This project included laboratory building modifications; instrument purchases, installation, and training; supply acquisition; CDC training and validation; and proficiency testing participation.

Through the Chemical Terrorism Response Program, the laboratory has been working with public health personnel, emergency responders, and other groups potentially involved in a chemical emergency event to develop training programs for chemical emergency response. The State Public Health Laboratory has also met with other response groups including state universities, local public health agencies, military, other state and federal agencies, inter-departmental agencies, local emergency planners, and HazMat teams to develop response plans and determine capabilities.



State Health Laboratory Chemist operating an instrument used to test urine samples for chemical agents.

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The State Public Health Laboratory is also a member of other states' laboratory networks, which can be utilized during emergency events.

The new laboratory instruments can also be used for the Biomonitoring Program. This program will provide the critical information necessary to help link exposure to a toxic substance and the development of disease. Biomonitoring involves the measurement of absorbed substances or their metabolites in the human tissues and body fluids. This information is used to improve decision-making by providing a measure of people's actual exposure to toxic chemical substances, identifying which groups of people are at greater risks of exposure, evaluating success of preventive actions, and improving the emergency response of public health officials. Biomonitoring data can be used directly by communities to identify potential exposures to chemicals that threaten their locale.

Community Heroes Volunteer Program Launched in Region D

*by Jaci McReynolds, Public Health Information Specialist,
Springfield-Greene County Health Department*

Kerri Oberbeck loves Italian food, laughing and using her gifts to help people. That's why Kerri joined Community Heroes.

The Community Heroes volunteer program recruits, trains and prepares volunteers in southwest Missouri to assist local public health departments in responding to bioterrorist attacks or other public health emergencies.

Experience shows a community must be prepared to respond and support itself for up to 72 hours following a disaster before outside help will arrive. Trained volunteers are a critical part of this response.

Oberbeck says, "Being prepared relieves a lot of stress off of the situation. You are able to accomplish more when you are prepared because you know exactly what to do in an emergency."

Community Heroes recognizes that every person has a skill, ability, or experience valuable in an effective response. Whether volunteers contribute one hour or a week of service, every donated minute is precious to the person who is helped. Donated time also helps a community recover financially from disasters.

The main focus of Community Heroes is to support local public health departments during public health emergencies, but volunteers' skills and abilities can also be utilized during times of peace. Volunteers will be offered a variety of service opportunities in their own communities as well as in surrounding counties.

Regardless of the task or length of service, each Community Hero is vital to the emergency response. Oberbeck says she is glad to help out, "Even if my purpose is just to tell someone that everything is going to be okay."

If you are interested in learning more about Region D's Community Heroes program, call Rebecca Burton at (417) 874-1297 or visit the web site at www.beacommunityhero.com.

For more information about similar volunteer efforts in other regions of the state, contact Sharlet Howren at (573) 751-6170 or howres@dhss.mo.gov.

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Our state and local public health mission is to protect the communities' health and the well-being of individuals of all ages by assuring the early detection and the rapid, coordinated response to all public health emergencies, both natural and deliberate.